

Approved by
the Select Board on:

10/25/2021

Meeting Minutes
SELECT BOARD MEETING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020
7:00 PM

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: October 28, 2021
TIME: 2:54 PM

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chair Roy Epstein. Vice Chair Tom Caputo and Select Board member Adam Dash were present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin, Assistant Town Administrator Jon Marshall, Audit Committee Chair Robert Keefe, Health Department Director Wesley Chin, Chief of Police James MacIsaac and DPW Director Jay Marcotte were also present.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Roy Epstein delivered a message from Town Clerk. Statewide, in-person early voting exists until end of October for presidential state election. Voters can cast early ballots in person at town hall Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 8 am to 4 pm, and Friday 8 am to noon. Polls are open on Tuesday, November 3rd from 7 am to 8 pm. This promises to be a busy election, so voters can anticipate a bit of a wait. Restrictions of COVID have reduced the number of voters allowed in polling place, but everyone in line by 8 pm will be able to vote
- Chief of Police MacIsaac announced on social media that we have had uptick on housebreaks especially in area of Winbrook School and Brighton St. area. Breaks seem to be occurring in the evening. Suspect is meandering in backyards so residents should be vigilant. We advise residents to lock doors, leave lights on. Don't leave ladders near side of house. Neighborhood cooperation is helpful. He said they have extra patrols in that area. There have been 8 breaks in last month and a half.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

[None]

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS

- Nurit Baytch brought up issue at last week's meeting about request to instate order, similar to Cambridge, that protects tenants with increased risk from COVID from landlords entering apartment for non-critical reasons. She said Patrice Garvin said that Town Counsel advised not instituting order for Belmont because it would open town up for litigation.
- Ms. Baytch commented that she doesn't understand why we can't do what Cambridge did, why is legal situation different here. Other issue is that her landlord, formally threatened legal action against her and said they would take her to court if she didn't let them in for "preventive maintenance." Landlord wants to install a water meter. She hoped that the town of Belmont would protect the health of tenants.

- Epstein accepts Town Counsel recommendation about not adopting ordinance. Epstein said the remedy she is seeking does not seem to be answer to problem she is having with landlord.
- Dash said we don't know basis for Cambridge adopting this law, but he knows they have in-house law department. Belmont doesn't have funds to defend suits. Landlord could sue town, if we adopt new town-wide policy that supersedes the state rules.
- Caputo said it's dangerous for us to put in place ordinances for specific issues and he has not heard other concerns about this.
- Board suggests pursuing remedies that already exist for tenants in this situation.

Executive Session:

Motion made to enter into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares. Select Board will return to public session right after the Executive Session. Approved by vote (3-0).

2nd CALL TO ORDER

Roy Epstein entertained motion to return to open session. Approved by vote (3-0)

COVID Update by Wesley Chin

- COVID 19 positive cases have been increasing. Belmont is not immune to trend. Belmont cases increased by 7 cases over this week. Now at 290 confirmed cases since beginning of pandemic. There's no obvious source, and trend is in line with what state is reporting. Reminder to wear face masks, use hand hygiene and social distancing.
- Last week the state suspended all ice skating and hockey activities in indoor skating rinks until November 7th. The suspension is attributed to positive related clusters coming out of ice skating facilities. The state will be researching this phenomenon and once we get guidelines from states they will address in timely manner.
- Jon Marshall said that they intend to open up rink when rules allow. They have been working with Public Works and Health Dept. to get everything prepped.
- Indoor dining protocols should be reviewed. Further tips can be found in detail on DPH website for COVID:
 - Face coverings for workers and customers except if unable to wear for medical reasons or if a customer seated at dine-in service at table.
 - Alcoholic beverages can only be consumed if food is prepared at restaurant.
 - Tables are required to be 6 feet apart. Dining parties can be up to 10 people, but important to have your name and phone number recorded for medical reasons.
 - Bar seating allowed, but people have to be 6 feet apart.
 - Eating is social event, but advise to not linger. Call ahead for info and look at menu ahead of time.
- Dash confirmed that the closure of Leonard St. ended and Claflin St. lot was charging again.
- Caputo asked if outdoor seating will continue through the winter. Garvin said that this is related to permits. They can continue if permitted, if they want to bring heaters, then they have to clear with Fire Department.

- Take out is always an option and restaurants have been able to do this successfully.
- Epstein asked about case count. Do we have resources to do contact tracing? Chin said that we do have resources but with 7 new cases, we had to refer some to state for help.

Update on FY19 Audit by Permanent Audit Committee.

Report was presented by Robert Keefe and based on the most recently completed audits for Town of Belmont for fiscal year ending June 30, 2019 and Belmont Light Department fiscal year ending December 31, 2019.

Members of Audit committee:

Robert Keefe: Chair

Frank Caruso

Robert Forrester

Glen Logan

- Independent members of the audit committee are appointed by Select Board on a three year rotating basis. Roy Epstein, Town accountant, Town treasurer also serve on Audit Committee. Town by-laws require that an audit be conducted not less than once every 3 years, however, historically town has done audit annually because 1) federal regulations require because the town receives federal funds; and, 2) to retain AAA credit rating by Moody's, which allows Belmont to receive more favorable rates. (Town of Belmont is one of only a few communities in the Commonwealth with a AAA rating.)
- Town of Belmont's financial statement for year ending June 30, 2019 was audited by Powers and Sullivan LLC. Town received unmodified opinion on its financial statement on Jan. 22, 2020. Town's statement also includes Belmont Light Department for year ending Dec. 31, 2019 (audited separately). Town received unmodified opinions on federal award programs as well. No material control weaknesses were identified and the auditors highly commended the town financial team on their record keeping. 2020 audit is expected to be completed on schedule.
- The Light Department audit by Goulet, Salvidio and Associates, PC also did not identify any material control weaknesses.
- The financial 2019 statements will be included in 2020 financial results. The 2020 audit for Light Department will begin in Nov. 2020 and will be completed consistent with past years.

Select Board discussion:

- Epstein asked whether there was question last year about treatment of uncollectable accounts in Light Dept. Keefe answered that there was a minor comment, but given dollars involved, it was considered minor and progress was made during year. Keefe said that we would find out about this in 2020 audit.
- Caputo thanked Keefe and the committee for their service. He questioned why there are two different auditors for town and Belmont Light. Keefe said that the municipal Light Dept. is a specialty area and that Goulet, Salvidio and Associates, PC are experts in this specialty. Caputo further queried if there could be cost savings if audits were consolidated under one firm. Keefe said there would probably not be savings because they need to give separate report required by state and reports are done at different times.

- Dash asked if audits should go out to bid again. Keefe said that the town audit has gone out to bid 3x during his tenure, and in each case, he has been satisfied with the process and the results. Audit Committee has contracted with Powers and Sullivan for 9 years and he feels they are still best choice, for both cost and quality. Contracts have been signed until fiscal year 2022. Since Light Dept. has had some turnover in management and reporting, they thought that retaining the same auditors would be less disruptive.

Water & Sewer Monthly Billing

Discussion initiated by Jay Marcotte, Director of DPW.

- Monthly billing has been part of the Smart Meter plan for the last 4 years that once fully implemented, the ability to go to monthly billing would be implemented. Benefits are that residents can see in real time their use. He has been working with Belmont Light last few weeks and they are 97% finished with Smart Manager implementations. This was delayed by COVID. There are about 400 meters that have not been replaced. DPW has reached out at least 6x with mailings, flyers, knocking on doors, and phone calls. We are moving on with the monthly billing and giving ourselves 3 months with outreach education. Residents can sign up through app "smart hub." Since going from quarterly to monthly, initial bill will be different for each residents (could have 1 month, 2 months or full 3 months billed in first bill).
- Service charge for water would break down to \$6.09 per month and sewer would break \$6.05 per month.
- Most common residential complaint on water sewer bills – residents want to know when we plan to go to monthly billing because quarterly bill can be quite high.
- For people with old meters, we still have to send people to those 400 meters not yet transitioned. Most communities send letters saying why this would incur additional cost, but since COVID it is a sensitive issue.
- Epstein asked why there are 400 not yet installed. Marcotte said they just have not received responses because people do not want anyone in their house. In Danvers, residents incur extra \$25 per house for those with Smart Meters. Epstein asked if that covers the additional metering costs. Marcotte said right now, it does cover it, but once we get done to 100 meters left, we would need more than \$25. In Billerica, DPW Director implemented \$1000 fee.
- Epstein said it seems appropriate for people choosing higher cost method, to impose the additional cost and impose additional grace period. It seems reasonable to start with \$25 and we can reevaluate once we see response.
- Marcotte said they will reach out on regular basis before they impose fee. If we waive fee until Spring, then he could come back with budget.
- Dash asked if Water Advisory Board has looked at this and Marcotte confirmed that he has spoken to Frank French and no one had any issues. There is no change for auto pay customers except service charge would be divided by 3. Bills still based on consumption. Dash asked if there is increased cost to implement monthly billing. Marcotte said they are still trying to work out that figure with Belmont Light. We are billing every month but basing on quarterly fee. He hopes that the higher volume of bills would reduce cost of each bill.

- Epstein asked if on Day 1 would we be sending out 3X number of paper bills. Belmont Light currently bills quarter of the town every week. Would water bill be included with electric bill? Marcotte said they have not made decision on that; currently going forward with two separate bills, but would like to go to one bill.
- Dash said that the problem with that is that tenants don't always pay water bill, but pay electric bill.
- Caputo said there would be considerable cost savings if sent out at once. Marcotte said they are hoping that people decide to do online payments, online payments would be easier to direct to the right payee.
- Epstein said we may need incentive to switch to electronic option. He concurred that concept sounds good. He asked if they need formal vote? Marcotte said it would be change in operation, so he and Patrice believe a vote is necessary.

Motion made to approve conversion of water and sewer quarterly billing cycle to monthly billing starting Jan. 1, 2021. Motion approved by vote (3-0).

Discussion on Black Earth Composting Discussion initiated by Jay Marcotte.

- Several residents have reached out in past year to investigate preferred vendor subscription similar to Newton and Boston, going out to bid asking organic recyclers if they would be interested in doing curbside organics collection based on subscription (town would endorse as preferred vendor, bid would be based on volume so if more subscriptions, better pricing.)
- He received one bid from Black Earth and they are ready to go right now. There are 642 subscriptions currently in Belmont. Goal is to get to 1500 subscriptions to get price break. Right now there is direct relationship with residents, no town involvement. Currently the 642 are paying \$99.99 for one-year subscription. Black Earth wants to do 6 months subscription (49.99) with start up fee (\$34). This includes 13 gallon container and bag liners. Currently they pick up on Tuesdays in town. Once we hit 1500 subscriptions, then price would drop to \$44.99 for 6 months; next goal is 3000 and that would be 39.99 per subscription. Every resident would get voucher for 10 lb. bag of compost and voucher is valid at Wagon Wheel in Lexington. Flyers and videos for educational outreach about composting would be available. Marcotte has discussed launching campaign with Belmont Citizen Herald.

Select Board discussion:

- Epstein thinks it's a great program and looks like an extension of our recycling program. Marcotte said operationally, this is no different than current recycling and residents have to bring container to curb.
- Epstein asked Garvin how we can designate vendor as preferred vendor. Garvin said this was based on procurement law and it's like any other vendor. Marcotte said we put out a bid to encourage residents to subscribe. There are other companies that residents are currently using, but there are only 75 total subscriptions with those other companies. Residents can keep their other subscriptions even if town decides to have Black Earth as preferred vendor.

- Caputo reminded that we are leveraging town resources to promote. If we went through this process, we would need to do full procurement. Marcotte said he can show bid for preferred vendor. Epstein is puzzled if we are trying to steer toward Black Earth. Did Black Earth ask us to designate them?
- Dash asked about cost. Marcotte said there will be costs based on time put in by staff. There is big benefit because 20% of organics is trash. So the new program would produce 20% less trash. There would be net positive cost based on amount saved on town trash volume.
- Caputo suggested that we could align this with trash pick up day once it scales up.
- Marcotte said that he did research on savings if done town wide. With 6000 organic buckets we could save 20% on trash collection or about \$109,000. If bags are contaminated, they will not pick it up.
- Epstein asked if this decision requires vote. Garvin said this just needs an endorsement. All Select Board members approved endorsement.

Accept Resignation of Donna Brescia from the Belmont Housing Authority

- Donna Brescia was elected to another term, but has resigned due to personal circumstances. We are looking to fill current term by making interim appointment until regular election in Spring.

*Motion made to accept resignation of Donna Brescia from Belmont Housing Authority.
Approved with vote (3-0).*

- Dash asked when meeting could be held with Housing Authority. Epstein said there is currently a live ad on the town website. Similar to School Committee, hopefully, in about two weeks we would have meeting to develop questions to ask candidates. If we don't have much interest, we have to decide how long to keep window open vs. working with current applicants.

Committee Appointments: Information Technology Advisory Committee, Website Renewal Committee, Structural Impact Reform Committee and Long Term Capital Planning Committee
Discussion initiated by Jon Marshall.

Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) – in September the board made appointment for Jonathan Birge to fill expiring term and he is interested in renewing. Berg has been on for about a year. Three others were interested in position, but Jonathan has done good job so they would like to renew his appointment.

Motion made to appoint Jonathan Birge to Information Technology Advisory Committee; term to expire 2023. Approved by vote (3-0).

Long Term Capital Planning Committee – had one follow up for appointment. The Energy Committee chair would like to nominate Claus Becker.

Motion made to appoint Claus Becker to Long Term Capital Planning Committee as Energy Committee's representative. Approved by vote (3-0.)

Structural Impact Reform Committee (SIRC) – at the Board's last meeting there were a number of appointments made and there are a few more appointments to be made tonight.

- The School Committee will be voting at their meeting tomorrow at which time we will update committee. The Energy Committee recommended Travis Franck for Energy Committee seat. Waiting for By Law Review Committee, and then we have additional resident appointment that was made previously. Marshall had followed up with member from Disability Access Commission (DAC) who expressed interest and person was interested on serving on this committee and website renewal committee.
- Dash thought putting Patricia Groves on SIRC would be good choice. He also suggested Mike Alonza for candidate for website committee. He just wants to make sure they agree.

Motion made to appoint Travis Frank to the Structural Impact Reform Committee Searches energy committee member. Approved by vote (3-0).

Motion made to appoint Patricia Groves to Structural Impact Reform Committee. Approved by vote (3-0).

Epstein asked if that leaves the School Committee as the only remaining appointment for the By Law Review Committee. If By Law Review Committee won't put someone on, we may want to eliminate that position. Marshall will try to have answer back from them by next meeting.

Website Renewal Committee – Disability Access Commission (DAC) needs to make one appointment.

- We are still waiting to hear from Vision 21. We still have resident and business owner seat to fill.
- Economic Development Committee (EDC) did not have quorum so cannot supply follow up, but Marshall said that vice chair, Emma, said she did not receive a lot of feedback from business owners. Dash also reached out to Emma Thurston about whether business owner had to be resident; it would be easier for EDC to identify someone if they didn't have to be a resident.
- Epstein would like EDC to select their own candidate.

Motion made to approve Disability Access Commission post to Michael Lanza Approved by vote (3-0)

- Epstein confirmed that they were still waiting on Vision 21. He thought if Erin Lubien has expressed interest, it would be appropriate to proceed with putting Ian Rosenbloom in resident slot and Erin Lubien for the EDC selection.
- Caputo clarified that it is not technically an EDC appointment; the Select Board is only asking their opinion. Erin has expressed enthusiasm and has appropriate background.

- Epstein advised if it's really not our appointment, then maybe it's appropriate to proceed with putting Ian in resident slot and Erin in business owner slot.
- Dash said looking back at e-mail from Emma Thurston, she had people available who were not residents. He suggested that it may be Erin ends up being the candidate, but since we still have to fill Vision 21, we should wait until Emma has a chance to find more candidates, if possible.

Motion made to appoint Ian Rosenbloom as resident to Website Renewal Committee. Approved by vote (3-0).

Discussion and approval of Green Communities Annual Report Submission Discussion initiated by Ben Thivierge from Belmont Light Department

- He said he can't submit report yet because he is currently waiting on missing information. Current excel file that DOER uses includes large area that says "if you don't have enough information, please don't submit."
- Epstein asked for summary of report. Thivierge replied that town was designated Green Community in 2014. This is annual report for fiscal Year 2020 ending in June. We have 3 to 4 months to rectify electric and gas usage and fossil fuel (non utility). We submit to system and then it generates our emissions numbers. Then we rectify with acts we have taken by town for facility upgrades, vehicle fleet, policy changes for building code and report gets submitted to Department of Energy annually.
- Thivierge is still waiting on portion from facilities and bills associated with non-electric and gas resources. He is hoping to get information into system this week. Due by Nov. 6 with signed page by Town Executive.
- Epstein asked Garvin since we won't meet by November 6, who would sign it. Last year Garvin and Epstein signed. Garvin explained it's just submission of usage. Select Board is comfortable with Roy, Ben and Patrice reading it. Epstein confirmed he is around next week to sign.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Complete Streets Update

- Town submitted a Complete Streets Update projects but due to competitive nature did not get funding (see attached letter). First time submitting for funding and we were told it was strong application. There are future rounds and we have spoken to state about how we can improve. There were changes in positions at state level and sometimes when administration changes in department, focus can change. There has been shift to former focus. We are going to hone application. Requested \$400,000 (max). Garvin said we had a technical assistance grant and public interest process to develop prioritization plan so it was disappointing to not be chosen for funding.
- Caputo said he was discouraged to read this considering engagement of community. Is it and all or nothing decision? Garvin said it was all or nothing. He asked if it makes sense for us to submit a more modest but targeted submission.
- Garvin said that the state is now looking for bicycle accommodation and our grant focused on sidewalks repair and pedestrian safety access to schools. We thought this was

what they wanted. We were told to not bother to submit funding for lights and crossing signals and then we found out that towns receiving these grants were getting lights. She expressed her disappointment to the state administration.

Update on Accountant Office transition

Town accountant Chitra Subramanian has decided not to seek reappointment. Job has been posted and interim plan will be brought to next board meeting. Town accountant positions are challenging to fill. Garvin said she may have to find an acting town accountant and re-examine the search process.

Comments by Residents:

- Kate Bowen raised questions about Complete Streets and Green Communities. She is glad that the town embarked on process. But she was wondering what other things the state was looking for that was different from what was submitted. Garvin said she is still talking to state and would like to take this offline after she has those conversations. We felt our application was safety oriented.
- Kate reaffirmed the importance of the Green Communities report and hoped that this would be submitted on time because it's dependent on future grants for DOER. Garvin added that Facilities has been dealing with school issues so that's why they may be delayed. Epstein said the Select Board is committed to getting report in on time.

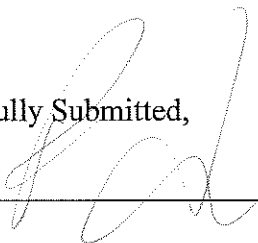
SELECT BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS

[None]

Motion made to adjourn. Approved by vote (3-0).

Next Meeting: Monday, November 9, 2020

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator